

Message

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Sent: 9/23/2021 11:49:07 AM
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CC: Rowan, Anne [rowan.anne@epa.gov]; Leon, Heriberto [leon.heriberto@epa.gov]
Subject: FW: Benton Harbor newsclips 9/23/21

From: Arcaute, Francisco <Arcaute.Francisco@epa.gov>
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2021 6:28 AM
To: Rowan, Anne <rowan.anne@epa.gov>; Gillespie, Taylor <Gillespie.Taylor@epa.gov>; Cannon, Phillippa <Cannon.Phillippa@epa.gov>; Singer, Joshua <Singer.Joshua@epa.gov>; Leon, Heriberto <leon.heriberto@epa.gov>; Pope, Janet <Pope.Janet@epa.gov>
Subject: Benton Harbor newsclips 9/23/21

<https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/michigan/2021/09/23/michigan-sending-water-filters-to-benton-harbor-due-to-lead/>

Michigan sending water, filters to Benton Harbor due to lead

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. – The state of Michigan will provide bottled water and water filters in Benton Harbor, where tests have revealed elevated levels of lead, a spokesman said Wednesday.

The action comes less than two weeks after about 20 groups urged the Biden administration to immediately step in. They said local and state officials have not adequately responded since the contamination was discovered three years ago in the Black, mostly low income community.

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy will provide bottled water and go door-to-door to ensure proper installation of faucet filters, spokesman Scott Dean told the Detroit Free Press.

Testing children is also part of the plan. Free water will be available until the filter distribution is completed. The target is Oct. 8.

“The state of Michigan remains committed to ensuring every Michigander has access to safe drinking water,” Dean said.

A local activist, the Rev. Edward Pinkney, praised the moves but noted that three years have passed since elevated lead levels were revealed.

The National Resources Defense Council, or NRDC, said the free water should continue beyond early October.

"There's this ongoing issue — as we all saw in Flint — of filter maintenance, and of ensuring that the filters are being used properly," Cyndi Roper of the NRDC said. It shouldn't end "with a swing through the community, dropping off filters and having a conversation about filter use."

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has called for spending \$20 million in Benton Harbor to replace nearly 6,000 service lines, most suspected of containing lead, within five years.

Benton Harbor is in the southwestern corner of Michigan, roughly 200 miles from Flint, where lead flowed through old pipes in 2014-15 because water pulled from a river wasn't properly treated to reduce corrosion.

<https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2021/09/22/benton-harbor-receive-bottled-water-lead-filters-blood-tests/5817713001/#.~:text=Benton%20Harbor%20residents,kmatheny%40freepress.com>.

Benton Harbor residents to receive bottled water, filters, blood lead testing for children
Keith Matheny
Detroit Free Press

Residents of Benton Harbor with elevated levels of lead in their municipally supplied drinking water have help on the way from the state of Michigan — less than two weeks after 20 nonprofit organizations appealed to the federal government to take action.

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy on Wednesday announced several steps that will be taken to assist the community, including providing bottled water, going door-

to-door to ensure distribution and proper installation of faucet lead filters, and testing of the blood-lead levels of children.

The moves come after 20 environmental and public advocacy organizations filed a petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, urging federal intervention to secure safe water supplies for the southwest Michigan city's nearly 10,000 residents. The ongoing exposure to high lead levels for Benton Harbor residents, 85% of whom are Black, hearkened many back to the Flint water crisis of 2014, and was framed as an environmental justice issue.

Since fall 2018, more than 60 homes in the city have tested for lead levels in their drinking water that exceed the federal government's action level of 15 parts per billion. One home tested for 889 parts per billion, nearly 60 times the federal safety limit.

"The State of Michigan remains committed to ensuring every Michigander has access to safe drinking water," EGLE spokesman Scott Dean said. "Benton Harbor's aging drinking water infrastructure is a major focus of that effort and the work to remove lead from people's drinking water is accelerating."

The Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the grassroots Benton Harbor Community Water Council, praised the new developments. Pinkney made an urgent appeal for federal, state or local governments to provide an alternate water supply at a press conference announcing the EPA petition Sept. 9.

"I am happy to see that they have taken my advice and are putting this into operation," he said. "We shouldn't have had to wait three years for this — that's the unfortunate part."

Dean said the residential door-to-door effort will "provide assurance that every household in Benton Harbor has been visited and offered a free water filter as part of an enhanced filter distribution effort." The plan is to complete this effort by Oct. 8, he said. Free bottled water will be made available to the community until the filter distribution is completed.

An expanded public education and community outreach campaign also will be conducted to increase awareness of the city's current water quality and the availability of water filters and resources for residents, Dean said.

"We're acting on the feedback from residents that they either didn't know about the 2019 filter distribution or didn't know how to install or maintain the filters," he said. "This door-to-door effort is to not only make sure that everyone who wants a filter gets one, but also providing education and hands-on help in installing and maintaining the filters."

But an official with the environmental nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council, which helped drive the petition effort to the EPA on Benton Harbor, questioned the plan, particularly its cut-off time for supplied water.

"The emergency water must continue until we are well beyond clearly demonstrating these filters are effective," said Cyndi Roper, a senior policy advocate with the NRDC.

People must have confidence in the effectiveness of the filters as well, she said.

"Their trust has been violated," Roper said. "Drinking water has not been safe for at least the past three years. We cannot cut corners when it comes to ensuring they have the water they need, and that it is not being run through unproven filters.

"There's this ongoing issue — as we all saw in Flint — of filter maintenance, and of ensuring that the filters are being used properly. That it doesn't end with a swing through the community, dropping off filters and having a conversation about filter use."

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will establish an ongoing Water Ambassadors Program to recruit "trusted non-government community members to assist with individual outreach at a grassroots level to help build trust with the community," Dean said.

Health officials also are developing a longer-term plan to ensure Benton Harbor residents are supported with public health resources, "including access to lead mitigation measures and blood-lead level testing" for children, Dean said.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, no safe level of lead in children has been identified. Adverse affects from excessive exposure to the heavy metal include:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

High lead exposure also has been tied to lower IQ, decreased ability to pay attention and underperformance in school.

"That is huge — that has never taken place here," Pinkney said of the blood lead testing in children.

Roper noted that the state's end-of-October time frame for testing children's blood for lead, combined with adding lead water filters to people's taps in early October, could mean that by the time testing is

done, "the lead that would have been in their blood will have likely moved into the soft tissue and bones" — still capable of harming their health, but less likely to turn up in a blood test.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's budget included \$10 million in additional investment to replace lead service lines in Benton Harbor and \$15 million for the Emergency Drinking Water Fund to help the state address future drinking water emergencies.

"As part of this investment, the state will also provide technical support to communities dealing with lead service line removal," Dean said.

All together, the state has leveraged \$18.6 million and has committed to replacing 100% of Benton Harbor's lead service lines.

But waiting on the pipe replacements would have left residents drinking potentially lead-tainted water in the interim, perhaps several years. That's what makes the latest announcements important, Pinkney said.

"We're going to do what we need to do to make sure this community has safe water," he said. "That's our only priority. I don't care about the politics of this, or any of that. We can no longer sit by and let our children be poisoned with lead."

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<https://wsbt.com/news/local/lead-pipe-removal-efforts-in-benton-harbor-get-a-10-million-funding-boost>

Lead pipe removal efforts in Benton Harbor get a \$10 million funding boost

by WSBT 22

Wednesday, September 22nd 2021

Michigan's new budget deal would include \$10 million toward getting rid of lead pipes in Benton Harbor

This comes as the city approves new private contracts to remove hundreds of lead pipes around the community.

Those contracts will be funded using federal money from the EPA.

Over 300 lead pipes are expected to be replaced over the next 4 years.

Phase one of the work starts next month.

https://www.heraldpalladium.com/communities/benton_harbor/benton-harbor-to-get-10m-from-state-to-remove-lead-pipes/article_30884f7f-80ce-59d2-b4aa-1b1395f5def0.html

Benton Harbor to get \$10M from state to remove lead pipes

(Article requires subscription)

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